



HELSINKI COMMISSION BRIEFING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

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Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Good morning and welcome to Ambassador Munteanu, our other panelists, and to everyone joining us today. This morning we will examine the human cost of Moldova's unresolved conflict with its breakaway region of Transnistria, and the prospects for resolving this almost twenty year-old tragedy.

Exactly ten years ago I chaired the first commission hearing focused specifically on Moldova – “Moldova: Are the Russian Troops Really Leaving?” A decade later we can still ask the same question, as a contingent of Russian troops remains in Transnistria notwithstanding specific commitments to withdraw, which the Russian government made at the Istanbul OSCE Summit in 1999.

For almost twenty years the Russian government has maintained troops in Transnistria against the wishes of the Moldovan government; and in violation of the Helsinki Final Act; as well as in violation of other international commitments, freely undertaken by the Russian government, regarding the stationing of foreign forces on the territory of another state without the consent of the host government, and regarding respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states. The Russian Government has aided and supported a despotic and corrupt administration in Transnistria – an illegitimate government which is recognized by no other government in the world, not even the Russian. As a consequence, Moldova's central government is unable to extend its authority to Transnistria.

The administration in Transnistria has managed a sustained campaign to stifle civil society, free media, and all political opposition. Its human rights record is marred by torture and the arbitrary arrest of citizens who differ with the ruling administration, including journalists such as Ernest Vardanean, sentenced to fifteen years in prison on trumped-up charges of espionage. Thanks to international pressure, Vardanean was recently released, though Ilie Cazac, a tax official who was arrested on trumped-up charges of espionage along with him, remains in prison. The State Department's 2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices cites numerous instances of such arbitrary arrests, political pressure on judges, and judicial corruption. The Transnistrian courts are reputed to be some of the most corrupt in the world.

I will leave it to our panelists to provide greater detail on other abuses that have made the Transnistrian government infamous – rigging elections, expropriating property without

compensation, harassing travelers, restricting education in Romanian language, complicity in smuggling, including arms smuggling, and customs fraud. Of course we are all aware that the government of Moldova also has grave limitations in respect of human rights, democratic practice, and corruption – and the moral cesspool inhabited by the Tiraspol administration cannot be taken to give the Moldovan government a free pass. The state of human rights and democracy under the Moldovan government will certainly be the subject of a commission hearing or briefing in the future.

As the author of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and several reauthorizations of that legislation, I particularly hope to learn more about how we can better fight human trafficking in the region – not only Transnistria but Moldova in general was once the focus of this human tragedy within Europe. While some progress has been made, trafficking in persons remains a very, very serious problem in Moldova, and official reporting on trafficking in Transnistria has been sketchy, so I hope our panelists will address this..

The Transnistrian administration came on the scene twenty years ago as a security issue, through a small-scale civil war that then became a frozen conflict, and developed into a human rights tragedy. Here we see the close connection between security and human rights – an idea that is at the core of the OSCE.

Now there is a renewed push to peacefully resolve the Transnistria conflict, above all by the U.S. and the European Union – both are working hard to put the issue on the table with Russia. It is not yet clear whether the Russian government is serious about resolving the issue, or is merely going through the motions, content with a status quo that prolongs instability and insecurity in the region. I'm sure our panelists will enlighten us on this.

We are fortunate to have an impressive panel of experts, each of whom has been engaged with Moldova and the Transnistria frozen conflict. We look forward to hearing their views and recommendations on the human rights situation in Transnistria and on resolving the conflict. The panelists' full bios are available outside the hearing room, so I will provide only short introductions.

We will hear, first, from Ambassador Igor Munteanu, Moldova's Representative to the United States, who has also had a distinguished academic and think-tank career.

Ambassador Munteanu will be followed by Vladimir Socor, a senior fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, and former analyst with Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty.

Next up will be Vlad Spanu, President of the Moldova Foundation and former senior diplomat of Moldova.

And then we will hear from Lyndon Allin, a corporate attorney and policy expert who has done extensive work on Transnistria.

We also have a written statement from Matthew Rojansky, Deputy Director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which will be included in

the briefing record.